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UNCLAS ASUNCION 000399

SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS TO USAID LAC/AA  
NSC FOR KIMBERLY BREIER  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: DEMONSTRATORS AND PRESIDENTIAL SECURITY  
CLASH IN PEDRO JUAN CABALLERO

REF: ASUNCION 00352

1. On 3/21, President Duarte's security detachment clashed with demonstrators in Pedro Juan Caballero while Duarte met with Governor of Amambay Department Robert Acevedo and a group of mayors and civic leaders. According to press reports, four people were arrested and several injured in the confrontation, which apparently ensued when demonstrators attempted to push past a security cordon.

2. In addition to local concerns, such as land for campesino farmers and environmental issues, the demonstrators reportedly protested the presence of U.S. personnel in the region, asserting that a new National Counterdrug Secretariat (SENAD) office being constructed with Andean Counterdrug Initiative funds is going to serve as a U.S. military base. Some observers maintain that a political dispute between Acevedo, who hails from the opposition Liberal (PLRA) party but supports Duarte's anti-corruption efforts, and another PLRA faction was also at play. Acevedo told the press he appreciated Duarte's visit and support.

3. Comment: Pedro Juan Caballero is known for its drug trafficking and official corruption. Governor Acevedo is an outspoken critic of such illicit activity, and an avid supporter of U.S. programs in the region. Ambassador just met with him last week. Local organizations staged similar demonstrations when EmbOfs and a visiting INL program director traveled to Pedro Juan Caballero in early March to meet with Acevedo and visit the site of the new SENAD office (reftel). In the face of this week's demonstrations, Acevedo reiterated his support for Duarte's anti-corruption efforts and GOP programs in the region.  
KEANE